

## M/C Journal, Vol. 14, No. 5 (2011) - 'zone'

### Everyday Life in the "Tourist Zone"

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*Donell Joy Holloway, David Anthony Holloway*

This article makes a case for the everyday while on tour and argues that the ability to continue with everyday routines and social relationships, while at the same time moving through and staying in liminal or atypical zones of tourist locales, is a key part of some kinds of tourist experience. Based on ethnographic field research with grey nomads (retirees who take extended tours of Australia in caravans and motorhomes) everyday life while on tour is examined, specifically the overlap and intersection between the out-of-the-ordinary "tourist zone" and the ordinariness of the "everyday zone."

The "everyday zone" and "tourist zone" can be readily differentiated by their obvious geospatial boundaries (being at home or being away on holiday). More specifically, the "everyday zone" refers to the routines of quotidian life, or the mundane practices which make up our daily, at-home lives. These practices are closely connected with the domestic realm and include consumption practices (clothing, cooking, mass media) and everyday social interactions. The "tourist zone" is similarly concerned with consumption. In this zone, however, tourists are seen to consume places; the culture, landscape, and peoples of exotic or out-of-the-ordinary tourist locales. Needless to say this consumption of place also includes the consumption of services and objects available in the tourist destinations (Urry, "The Consuming of Place" 220).

The notion of tourists being away from home has often been contrasted with constructions of home—with the dull routines of everyday life—by social scientists and tourist marketers alike in an effort to illuminate the difference between being "away" and being at "home." Scott McCabe and Elizabeth Stokoe suggest that peoples' notion of "home" takes into account the meaning of being away (602). That is to say that when people are away from home, as tourists for example, they often compare and contrast this with the fundamental aspects of living at home. Others, however, argue that with the widespread use of mobile communication technologies, the distinction between the notion of being at "home" and being "away" becomes less clear (White and White 91). In this sense, the notion of home or the everyday is viewed with an eye towards social relationships, rather than any specific geographical location (Jamal and Hill 77–107; Massey 59–69; Urry, "The Tourist Gaze" 2–14; White and White 88–104). It can be argued, therefore, that tourism entails a fusion of the routines and relationships associated with the everyday, as well as the liminal or atypical world of difference.

This article is based on semi-structured interviews with 40 grey nomads, as well as four months of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in rural and remote Australia—in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, and South Australia. Grey nomads have been part of Australian senior culture for at least four decades. They are a relatively heterogeneous group of tourists encompassing a range of socio-economic backgrounds, preferred activities, health status, and favoured destinations (Davies *et al.* 40–1; Economic Development Committee 4; Holloway 117–47), as well as age cohorts—including the frugal generation (1910–1932), the silent generation (1931–1946), and the baby boomer generation (1946–65). Grey nomads usually tour as spousal couples (Tourism Research Australia 26; Onyx and Leonard 387). Some of these couples live solely on government pensions while others are obviously well-resourced—touring in luxury motorhomes costing well over half a million dollars. Some prefer to bush camp in national parks and other isolated locations, and some choose to

stay long term in caravan parks socialising with other grey nomads and the local community.

All grey nomads, nonetheless, maintain a particularly close link with the everyday while touring. Mobile communication technologies anchor grey nomads (and other tourists) to the everyday—allowing for ready contact with existing family and friends while on tour. Grey nomads' mobile dwellings, their caravans and motorhomes, integrate familiar domestic spaces with a touring life. The interior and exterior spaces of these mobile dwellings allow for easy enactment of everyday, domestic routines and the privatised world of adult spousal relationships. This peripatetic form of dwelling, where the dwelling itself accommodates both travel and an everyday domestic life further blurs the distinctions between the "everyday zone" and the "tourist zone". In this sense grey nomads carry out a lifestyle that is both anchored and mobile; anchored in the everyday domestic life while at the same time being nomadic or geographically unstable.

This blurring of the boundaries between the "everyday zone" and "tourist zone" is attractive to senior tourists, offering them a relatively safe and comfortable incursion into tourist locales, where established routines and patterns of everyday life can be maintained. Other homes-away-from-homes such as serviced apartments, holiday homes and house swaps also offer greater connection to the everyday, but are geographically anchored to specific tourism spaces. The caravan or motorhome allows this at-home connection for the peripatetic tourist offsets the relative rigours of outback touring in remote and rural Australia.

### **Everyday Social Relationships in the "Tourist Zone"**

When tourists go away from home, they are usually thought of as being away from both place (home) and relationships (family and friends). Nowadays, however, being away from home does not necessarily mean being away from family and friends. This is because the ease and speed of today's telecommunication technologies allows for instantaneous contact with family and friends back home—or the virtual co-presence of family and friends while being away on tour. In the past, those friends and relations who were geographically isolated from each other still enjoyed social contact via letters and telegrams. Such contacts, however, occurred less frequently and message delivery took time. Long distance telephone calls were also costly and therefore used sparingly. These days, telecommunication technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet, as well as the lower cost of landline phone calls, mean that everyday social contact does not need to be put on hold. Keeping in contact is now a comparatively fast, inexpensive, and effortless activity and socialising with distant friends and relatives is now a routine activity (Larsen 24).

All grey nomads travel with a mobile phone device, either a digital mobile, Next G or satellite phone (Obst, Brayley and King 8). These phones are used to routinely keep in contact with family and friends, bringing with them everyday familial relationships while on tour. "We ring the girls. We've got two daughters. We ring them once a week, although if something happens Debbie [daughter] will ring us" (Teresa). Grey nomads also take advantage of special deals or free minutes when they scheduled weekly calls to family or friends. "I mainly [use] mobile, then I ring, because I've got that hour, free hour" (Helen). E-mail is also a favoured way of keeping in contact with family and friends for some grey nomads. This is because the asynchronicity of e-mail interaction is very convenient as they can choose the times when they pick up and send messages. "Oh, thank goodness for the e-mail" (Pat).

Maintaining social contact with family and friends at a distance is not necessarily as straightforward as when grey nomads and other tourists are at home. According to

discussants in this study and the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee, mobile phone coverage within Australia is still rather patchy when outside major metropolitan areas. Consequently, the everyday task of kin keeping via the phone can be somewhat intermittent, especially for those grey nomads who spend a great deal of time outside major towns in rural and remote Australia. "You can never get much [reception] but [...] they can just ring the mobile and just leave a message and we will get that message [later]" (Rena). Similarly, using the Internet to e-mail family and friends and catch up with online banking can only be carried out when passing through larger towns. "I do it [using the Internet] like every major town we went through. I'd stop and do a set of e-mails and I used to do my banking" (Maureen).

The intermittent phone coverage in remote and rural Australia was not always viewed as an inconvenience by discussants in this study. This is because continuing engagement with family and friends while on tour may leave little respite from the ongoing obligations or any difficulties associated with family and friends back home, and encroach on the leisure and relaxation associated with grey nomad touring. "I don't want the phone to ring [...] That's one thing I can do without, the phone ringing, especially at 4:00 in the morning" (Rena). In this way, too much co-presence, in the form of mobile phone calls from family and friends, can be just as much a nuisance when away from home as when at home—and impinge on the feeling of "being away from it all."

Naomi White and Peter White also suggest that "being simultaneously home and away is not always experienced in a positive light" (98) and at times, continued contact (via the phone) with friends and family while touring is not satisfying or enjoyable because these calls reiterate the "dynamics evident in those that are [usually] geographically proximate" (100). Thus, while mobile communication technologies are convenient tools for grey nomads and other tourists which blur the boundaries between the "everyday zone" and "tourist zones" in useful and pleasurable ways, their overuse may also encroach on tourists' away time, thus interfering with their sense of solitude and quiescence when touring in remote or rural Australia.

### **The "Everyday Zone" of the Caravan or Motorhome**

Being a tourist involves "everyday practices, ordinary places and significant others, such as family members and friends, but co-residing and at-a-distance" (Larsen 26). While tourism involves some sense of liminality, in reality, it is interspersed with the actuality of the everyday routines and sociabilities enacted while touring. Tim Edensor notes that;

Rather than transcending the mundane, most forms of tourism are fashioned by culturally coded escape attempts. Moreover, although suffused with notions of escape from normativity, tourists carry quotidian habits and responses with them: they are part of the baggage. (61)

Grey nomads go further than this by bringing on tour with them a domestic space in which everyday routines and sociabilities are sustained. Travelling in this manner "makes possible, and probably encourages, greater continuity with everyday routine than many other kinds of holiday making" (Southerton *et al.* 6). To be able to sleep in your own bed with your own pillow and linen, or perhaps travel with your dogs, makes caravanning and motorhoming an attractive touring option for many people.

Thus, the use of caravans or motorhomes when travelling brings with it a great deal of mobile domesticity while on tour. The caravan or motorhome is furnished with most of the essentially-domestic objects and technologies to enable grey nomads to sleep, eat, relax, and be entertained in a manner similar to that which they enjoy in the family home, albeit within smaller dimensions.

Lorna: We have shower, toilet. We had microwave, stereo. We have air conditioning and heating.

Eric: Yeah, reverse cycle air conditioning.

Lorna: Reverse cycle. What else do we have?

Eric: Hot water service. Gas or 240 volt. 12 volt converter in that, which is real good, it runs your lights, runs everything like that. You just hook it into the main power and it converts it to 12 volt. Roll out awning plus the full annex.

Lorna: Full annex. What else do we have? There's a good size stove in it.

The size of caravans and motorhomes means that many domestic tasks often take less time or are simplified. Cleaning the van takes a lot less time and cooking often becomes simplified, due to lack of bench and storage space. Women in particular like this aspect of grey nomad travel. "It is great. Absolutely. You don't have toilets to clean, you don't have bathrooms to clean. Cooking your meals are easier because everything is all [...] Yeah. It's more casual" (Sonya). This touring lifestyle also introduces new domestic routines, such as emptying chemical toilets, filling water tanks, towing and parking the van and refilling gas tanks, for example. Nonetheless grey nomads, spend significantly less time on these domestic tasks when they are touring. In this sense, the caravan or motorhome brings with it the comforts and familiarity of home, while at the same time minimising the routine chores involved in domestic life.

With the core accoutrements of everyday life available, everyday activities such as doing the dishes, watching television, preparing and eating a meal—as well as individual hobbies and pastimes—weave themselves into a daily life that is simultaneously home and away. This daily life, at home in the caravan or motorhome, brings with it possibilities of a domestic routinised lifestyle—one that provides welcome comfort and familiarity when travelling and a retreat from the demands of sightseeing.

On the farm I used to make jam and cakes, so I do it again [in the caravan]. I make jam, I made marmalade a couple of weeks ago. We'd often stay home [in the caravan], I'd just clean or do a bit of painting. (Jenny)

Touring in a caravan or motorhome allows for some sense of predictability: that you own and control the private spaces of your own mobile dwelling, and can readily carry out everyday domestic routines and sociabilities. "We go for a long walk. We come back and we see friends and we stop and have a coffee with them, and then you come home in the caravan at 2.30 and you can still have lunch" (Yvonne). Touring in a caravan or motorhome also frees grey nomads from dependence on prearranged

tourist experiences such as organised tours or hotel meal times where much of the tourist experience can be regimented.

We always went in hotels and you always had to dress up, and you had to eat before a certain time, and you had your breakfast before a certain time. And after 2.30 you can't have lunch anymore and sometimes we have lunch at 2 o'clock. I like the caravan park [better]. (Donald)

Despite the caravan or motorhome having close links with everyday life and the domestic realm, its ready mobility offers a greater sense of autonomy while touring: that you are unfettered, not bound to any specific place or timetable, and can move on at whim. Grey nomads often cross paths with other tourists dependent on guided bus tours. "They go in [to Kakadu] on a bus trip. All they do is go in on the main road, they're in there for the day and there're back. That's absolutely ridiculous" (Vance).

This autonomy, or freedom to structure their own tourist experiences, allows grey nomads the opportunity to travel at a leisurely pace. Even those grey nomads who travel to the same northern destination every year take their time and enjoy other tourist locations along the way.

We take our time. This time, last time, we did three weeks before we got in [to] Broome. We spent a lot [of time] in Karratha but also in Geraldton. And when we came back, in Kalbarri, [we had] a week in Kalbarri. But it's nice going up, you know. You go all through the coast, along the coast. (John)

Caravan or motorhome use, therefore, provides for a routinised everyday life while at the same time allowing a level of autonomy not evident in other forms of tourism—which rely more heavily on pre-booking accommodation and transport options. These contradictory aspects of grey nomad travel, an everyday life of living in a caravan or motorhome coupled with freedom to move on in an independent manner, melds the "everyday zone" and the "tourist zone" in a manner appealing to many grey nomads.

## Conclusion

Theories of tourism tend to pay little attention to the aspects of tourism that involve recurrent activities and an ongoing connectedness with everyday life. Tourism is often defined:

by contrasting it to home geographies and everydayness: tourism is what they are not. [...] The main focus in such research is on the extraordinary, on places elsewhere. Tourism is an escape from home, a quest for more desirable and fulfilling places. (Larsen 21)

Nonetheless, tourism involves everyday routines, everyday spaces and an everyday social life. Grey nomads find that mobile phones and the Internet make possible the virtual co-presence of family and friends allowing everyday relationships to continue while touring. Nonetheless, the pleasure of ongoing contact with distant family and friends while touring may at times encroach on the quietude or solitude grey nomads experienced when touring remote and rural Australia. In addition to this, grey nomads'

caravans and motorhomes are equipped with the many comforts and domestic technologies of home, making for the continuance of everyday domiciliary life while on tour, further obfuscating the boundaries between the "tourist zone" and the "everyday zone."

In this sense grey nomads lead a lifestyle that is both anchored and mobile. This anchoring involves dwelling in everyday spaces, carrying out everyday domestic and social routines, as well as maintaining contact with friends and family via mobile communication technologies. This anchoring allows for some sense of predictability: that you own and control the private spaces of your own mobile dwelling, and can readily carry out everyday domestic routines and sociabilities. Conversely, the ready mobility of the caravan or motorhome offers a sense of autonomy: that you are unfettered, not bound to any specific place and can move on at whim. This peripatetic form of dwelling, where the dwelling itself is the catalyst for both travel and an everyday domestic life, is an under researched area. Mobile dwellings such as caravans, motorhomes, and yachts, constitute dwellings that are anchored in the everyday yet unfixed to any one locale.

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